



BOROUGH OF MALDON.

Annual Report

OF THE

Medical Officer of Health

FOR

1920,

BY

H. REYNOLDS BROWN,

M.A., M.D.

MALDON:

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BOROUGH OF MALDON.

To the Mayor, the Aldermen and the Burgesses of the
Borough of Maldon.

GENTLEMEN,

I beg to report on the sanitary condition of the Borough of Maldon during the year 1920.

POPULATION. The population of Maldon at the census of 1911 was 6248. The Registrar General's estimate for the middle of 1920 was 6058. As the recently published figures for the census of 1921 give 6581, the probability is that the true figure for 1920 was about 6584.

PHYSICAL FEATURES OF THE DISTRICT. The Borough of Maldon includes the town—whose population is fairly dense, and in some streets unduly so—and a district which is completely rural in character, with only a few scattered farms and cottages. The town is partly low-lying—some houses being below the level of spring tides—and partly built on a ridge of London clay, rising to a height of about 100 feet. The upper part of the tidal Blackwater divides the town into two unequal portions, the larger lying on the south, or right bank of the estuary.

SOCIAL CONDITIONS. The chief occupations of the inhabitants are in connection with iron works, timber yards, flour mills, fishing and sea-faring, with a few agricultural labourers, and the usual trades of a small country town. To some extent Maldon acts as a dormitory to Chelmsford, where houses are even more scarce. Some 200 persons travel daily to and from work in that town, a distance of 14 miles by rail. House rents are low as a rule, varying from 5/-, or even less, to 10/- or 12/- per week. The home industries of the town are quite negligible, and are almost exclusively in connection with retail shops in the town. None of the occupations of the inhabitants have any special influence on public health.

VITAL STATISTICS. The year has proved to be an unusually healthy one. Both general and infant death rates were the lowest on record, and the birth rate was higher than that of any year since 1908.

	Birth rate per 1000 inhabitants.	Death rate per 1000 inhabitants.	Infant death rate per 1000 births.
Maldon, 10 years, 1904—13	21·5	13·9	94
„ 1918	13·3	19·1	65
„ 1919	16·8	11·3	59
„ 1920	24·2	10·4	40·8
England & Wales, 1920	25·4	12·4	80

The rates for 1920 are calculated on the Registrar General's estimate of the population. As stated above, this estimate appears from the recent census to be too low. Adopting the revised estimate of population (6584), founded on the census of 1921, the birth rate would be 22·5 and the death rate 9·72.

POOR LAW RELIEF. The number of persons in receipt of Poor Law Relief in the Borough were:—

	Institutional.	Cottage Homes.	Outdoor.	Vagrants.
Half-year ended Mar., 1920	35	8	89	70
„ „ Sept., 1920	30	9	83	151

HOSPITALS AND OTHER FORMS OF GRATUITOUS MEDICAL RELIEF. There is no General Hospital in the district. Infectious cases are treated at the Isolation Hospital of the Maldon Joint Hospital Board, situated at Heybridge, a mile outside the Borough. Fees are charged as a rule, but are remitted or reduced in necessitous cases. Non-infectious cases are sent either to the Union House Infirmary, or to the General Hospitals in Chelmsford (10 miles), Colchester (16 miles) or London (40 miles). By arrangement with the Joint Hospital Board a motor ambulance is available for conveyance of non-infectious cases.

A Voluntary Nursing Association provides two nurses, one for maternity and one for general nursing. The fees are low, and tickets for the gratuitous services of the general nurse are given to subscribers for distribution

Sanitary Circumstances of the District.

WATER. The public water supply is in the hands of the Corporation. It is derived from two wells, sunk through the London clay to the Reading and Thanet beds, and is distributed on the intermittent system.

The water is free from organic pollution; has practically no plumbo-solvent action; is fairly soft (7° to 8°) and not excessively saline (42 and 58 gr. of salt per gallon respectively in the two wells).

The available supply is about 15 gallons per inhabitant, without counting private deep wells at the Union House and a brewery, and ponds and surface wells which are used for carriage washing and the watering of gardens, &c.

A spring, which is liable to contamination, known as the Cromwell Well, has unfortunately a high local reputation for drinking purposes, as the water is clear and palatable. It is consequently made use of to some extent in spite of a warning notice board above it.

RIVERS AND STREAMS. The only fresh water stream in the Borough is the Chelmer. It receives no pollution within the Borough boundary.

The tidal waters of the Blackwater estuary receive the greater part of the Maldon sewage, after screening. There is a possibility of the infection of shell fish, and I have found oysters two miles below the outfall showing distinct contamination, while samples taken two miles further off satisfied Houston's "stringent standard."

Complaints were made by fishermen of the pollution of the tidal estuary by tarry matter from a suction gas plant and from the town sewers.

I investigated both of these sources of complaint, and found:—

- (1) That a considerable amount of tarry matter was discharged into the river from the suction gas plant.
- (2) That some tar from the gasworks had found its way into the town sewers.

In the first case considerable improvement was made by further treatment of the effluent by the owners of the factory.

In the second case improved arrangements were made to prevent the tar from reaching the sewers.

I was not, however, convinced that the alleged deterioration in fishing in the river was due to this cause.

DRAINAGE AND SEWERAGE. Of the 1519 houses in the Borough, about 1100 are connected with a system of sewers leading to tanks where the sewage is screened, and from which the effluent is discharged into the tidal water about a mile below the town, on the ebb. About 240 houses on the north slope of the town are drained by short sewers into the tidal water. On the north side of the river there are about 100 houses on low-lying ground for which a satisfactory drainage system has not yet been found possible. They are provided with pail closets which are emptied twice weekly by the Sanitary Authority. Their slop water is disposed of in some cases by sewers leading to the river, and in others by cesspools. As there are no wells in the neighbourhood there is no risk of water contamination.

CLOSET ACCOMMODATION. The number of houses in the Borough is 1524. There are 1383 W.C's., 71 waste water closets, 152 pail closets and 22 privies with covered middens in the district. No privies have been converted during the year, and those remaining are all in the rural portion of the Borough.

SCAVENGING. About 1200 houses are provided with moveable covered dustbins, which are emptied weekly by the Sanitary Authority. Ashpits, where they still exist, are cleared on the request of occupiers. Cesspools and privies are emptied by private contractors.

SANITARY INSPECTION OF THE DISTRICT.

Summary of Work of the Inspector of Nuisances.

No of inspections of cottage property	...	344
„ informal notices served	...	Nil
„ „ „ complied with	...	Nil
„ statutory notices served	...	144
„ „ „ complied with	...	147
„ common lodging houses in the district	...	1
„ „ „ „ inspections of	...	1
„ slaughterhouses in the district	...	7
„ „ inspections of	...	10
„ bakehouses in the district	...	9
„ „ inspections of	...	9
„ cowhouses in the district	...	8
„ „ inspections of	...	8
„ milk shops in the district	...	7
„ „ inspections of	...	10

PREMISES AND OCCUPATIONS WHICH CAN BE CONTROLLED BY BYE-LAWS OR REGULATIONS. There are no offensive trades in the district, no knackers yards, no houses let in lodgings within the meaning of the H. & T.P. Act, 1909, and no underground sleeping rooms.

SCHOOLS. There are two public elementary schools in the district, one provided and the other non-provided, and a provided secondary school. The premises are all in a satisfactory sanitary condition.

It was not found necessary to close any school during the year for infectious disease.

Non-infected children from infected houses are excluded from school, except in the case of measles, whooping cough or chicken pox, when they are not excluded if they have themselves already had the disease.

Food.

MILK SUPPLY. No action has been found necessary by the Council with regard to the milk supply. The Council is not the Local Authority under the Food and Drugs Act. The milk produced in and imported into the district is fairly satisfactory.

MILK (MOTHERS AND CHILDREN) ORDER, 1919. Trade being in a flourishing condition, only two cases were found during the year in which it was deemed advisable to provide milk under this Order, below cost price.

MEAT. Owing to the absence of a public abattoir, the variable times of killing in the private slaughterhouses and the smallness of the sanitary staff, no proper inspection of carcasses at the time of slaughter has been possible.

The condition of the slaughterhouses is good on the whole, and no diseased meat has been found on any such premises.

No action under Section 117 of the P.H. Act, 1875, has been necessary.

No carcasses or parts of carcasses have been condemned for tuberculosis.

The number of slaughterhouses in the district was :—

	In 1914.	Jan. 1920.	Dec. 1920.
Licensed	5	6	7
Registered	5	6	7

OTHER FOODS. Premises where other foods are stored or exposed for sale are inspected from time to time by the Medical Officer of Health and the Inspector of Nuisances. No cases have arisen where existing powers for dealing with such matters have been found inadequate.

FOOD POISONING. No cases of food poisoning have been brought to my notice during the year.

Prevalence and Control over Infectious Diseases.

During the past year the following cases of infectious disease have been notified:—

Scarlet Fever	...	6
Diphtheria	...	5
Enteric Fever	...	1
Erysipelas	...	2
Varicella	...	3
Pneumonia	...	7
Ophthalmia Neonatorum...		1

There were no deaths from any of these causes except one from erysipelas. There was also one death from measles. The cases of scarlet fever and diphtheria were all treated at the Heybridge Isolation Hospital.

The case of enteric fever was apparently an imported one.

It is interesting to note the steady decline of this disease in the last 25 years. Taking successive 5-year periods, the notifications have been:—

Years.	Notifications.	Years.	Notifications.
1896—1900	37	1911—1915	14
1901—1905	27	1916—1920	3
1906—1910	22		

and of the three cases notified in the last five years, one proved not to be a case of enteric, and one was almost certainly an imported case.

I am inclined to attribute this happy course of events to two main causes.

1. The abolition of privies in the town.
2. The relative absence of dust, owing to tar painting of the streets.

There were no "return" cases of scarlet fever.

A supply of diphtheria antitoxine is kept for the use of practitioners by the Medical Officer of Health. It had been used promptly in every case of the disease.

The County has made arrangements for bacteriological examinations, and these were made use of in every suspected case of diphtheria and in the case of enteric fever.

No "carrier" cases were found during the year.

No vaccinations were performed by the Medical Officer of Health under the P.H. (Small Pox Prevention) Regulations, 1917.

Only 41 vaccinations were performed during the year.

Verminous persons and their belongings are cleansed when required at the Heybridge Isolation Hospital.

Cases of tuberculosis appear to be promptly notified by medical practitioners.

Warning notices with regard to influenza were issued in accordance with ministerial instructions in January, but the disease never assumed epidemic form, and no deaths were registered as due to this cause.

Maternity and Child Welfare.

During the first half of the year the Council exercised its powers under the Maternity and Child Welfare Act. The Health Visitor of the Maldon Rural District acted in the same capacity in the Borough, with great efficiency. An Infant Welfare Centre was opened fortnightly, and was well attended, the average being about twenty mothers with their infants.

Difficulty soon arose, as the Health Visitor found that the work of the two districts was too heavy to carry on. The Borough Authorities did not find that the work of such a small district justified the appointment of a whole-time Health Visitor. Conferences were held with the County Authorities, which led to the County Council formulating a scheme by which it assumed the powers under the Act in the Borough, and appointed a whole-time officer to act as Health Visitor, School and Tuberculosis Nurse. This was duly approved and brought into force on the resignation of the Borough Health Visitor at the end of June.

No case of puerperal fever was notified during the year. An epidemic of measles which had prevailed during the later months of 1919 burned itself out early in 1920, after causing one death. There were two fatal cases of whooping cough in the course of a very limited epidemic. Pertussis vaccine was used, both for curative and prophylactic purposes with uniformly encouraging results. The only case of ophthalmia was in the Union House, and made a good recovery.

Sanitary Administration.

I. THE STAFF of the Sanitary Department consists of:—

1. The Medical Officer of Health, who is a part-time official, engaged in general practice. He is also Medical Superintendent of the Maldon Joint Isolation Hospital.
2. The Inspector of Nuisances who is also Borough Surveyor.
3. The Assistant Inspector of Nuisances, who is also Assistant Borough Surveyor.
4. The Health Visitor (up to June 30th) was also H.V. to the Maldon Rural District.

II. INFECTIOUS HOSPITAL ACCOMMODATION. The Infectious Hospital is situated at Heybridge, about a mile outside the Borough. It is managed by the Maldon Joint Hospital Board. Its area, strictly speaking, includes the Borough of Maldon and the northern parishes of the Maldon Union, with the exception of the Urban District of Burnham-on-Crouch. It also receives patients by a standing agreement from the northern parishes of the Maldon Union, the Urban District of Witham and the Port of Maldon.

There is provision for only 10 beds in the Ward Block, but wooden shelters have been added which can accommodate about 20 more patients. Owing to the scattered distribution of population in the area served, epidemics are never general, and it is rarely that the accommodation is at all severely taxed.

The Board has also a site for the isolation of small pox at Little Totham, about four miles from the Borough. There is a permanent corrugated iron kitchen in which some furniture is stored, and a well which yields a sufficient and satisfactory water supply. The wooden huts at the Heybridge Isolation Hospital are built in sections, and two or more would be moved to Totham within a few hours if necessity arose. If they happened to be already in use, and not available, an unlimited supply of marquees can be obtained from a dealer within three miles of the site, on the shortest notice.

The Hospital is administered by a Board, consisting of four members elected by the Town Council of the Borough, and five elected by the Maldon Rural District Council, from the representatives of the northern parishes, which constitute the Rural portion of the Joint Hospital District. Patients are also received from the southern parishes of the Maldon Rural District, the Witham Urban District, and the Maldon Port Sanitary District, each district paying an annual retaining fee towards the establishment expenses, and an agreed capitation fee for each patient admitted.

During the year 6 cases of scarlet fever and 5 of diphtheria from the Borough were treated at the Isolation Hospital. There were no deaths.

III. LOCAL ACTS, &c. The Local Sanitary Acts are :—

The Maldon Water Works Act, 1898.

The Maldon Joint Hospital Act, 1903.

The Adoptive Acts in force are :—

The Infectious Diseases Prevention Act, 1890.

The Public Health Amendment Act, 1890, parts II, III and IV.

The Public Health Acts Amendment Act 1907, parts II, V, VI, X, and secs. 34—51 (inclusive) in Part III, and secs. 52—67 (inclusive) in Part IV.

The Private Street Works Act, 1892.

The following Bye-Laws have been adopted :—

Dairies, Cowsheds and Milk Shops (1902).

Buildings, Nuisances, Slaughter Houses and Common Lodging Houses (1914).

IV. The Essex County Council has made arrangements with Drs. Thresh & Beale (The Counties' Public Health Laboratories, 91 Queen Victoria Street), for the examination of pathological specimens. These are sent direct by practitioners to the laboratories, and a report is returned both to the practitioner and the Medical Officer of Health. About 20 specimens, including throat swabs, blood for widal re-action and sputa have been dealt with during the year, apart from specimens sent up by the tuberculosis officer.

Housing.

I. GENERAL HOUSING CONDITIONS IN THE DISTRICT.

1. The total number of houses in the district was 1519, of which about 1470 were working class houses.

2. Even before the war there was a shortage of houses in the district, to which I have repeatedly called attention in my annual reports. Then in 1911, I pointed out that the density of population in the Borough had risen from 4·21 in 1901 to 4·36 in 1911. In that year your Housing Sub-Committee prepared plans for the erection of 32 new houses, but it was estimated that a loss of £1 per house per annum would fall on the rates, and unfortunately considerations of economy caused the scheme to be abandoned. Since the war, conditions have become much worse. It is impossible to deal satisfactorily with insanitary and overcrowded property, as there is literally no spare accommodation whatever. A beginning has been made in dealing with the shortage, contracts having been entered into for the building of 40 new houses.

3. Within the last few years an increasing number of persons live in Maldon who work at Chelmsford (where housing conditions appear to be still more unsatisfactory). This cause for the demand for houses in Maldon will continue to operate so long as housing in that town fails to keep pace with its rapid industrial development.

II. OVERCROWDING. 1. That overcrowding in the existing houses has reached a serious level is painfully evident. Houses which would accomodate one family with comfort often contain two and somtimes three, with the most unfortunate results not only to the immediate hygiene of the inhabitants, but to the property itself, which of course deteriorates very rapidly when used beyond its designed capacity.

2. The immediate cause of overcrowding lies in the facts

- (a) That no houses have been built since before the war.
- (b) That a large number of young men, who were mere boys in 1914, have returned to their homes, and live with their parents with the addition of a wife and one or more children. Further, as noted above, Maldon is becoming to an increasing extent, a dormitory for workers at Chelmsford.

3. Beyond the building of new houses, no radical measures have been possible for dealing with the overcrowding. The question for the Sanitary Authority comes to be: are the conditions of overcrowding so bad that a portion of the inhabitants must be driven into the Union House? And the conditions are not, in my opinion, so obviously bad that public opinion would tolerate such a policy.

All that it has been possible to do, is to give friendly advice in such matters as to the use of sitting rooms as bedrooms, &c.

The question of converting a wing of the Union House, which is not at present required, into working class flats, was seriously considered by your Council, but the Ministry did not find the accommodation suitable.

III. FITNESS OF HOUSES.

1. (a) The general standard of housing in the district is fair, though in some parts of the town it is very unsatisfactory.

(b) The chief defects found to exist in unfit houses are absence of damp course—want of height of rooms—insufficient window space—defective yard paving—want of cleanliness due to uneven floors and want of paint, &c.

(c) In such matters as repairs and decoration, some owners had been perhaps wilfully remiss, but all have been heavily handicapped by the difficulty of getting work done at all.

2. The Inspector of Nuisances has been un-remitting in his work, especially under the Public Health Acts, but also under the Housing Acts.

3. The work of dealing with the worst cases has been hampered by the absence of empty houses and the difficulty of obtaining labour.

4. The difficulties that used to be experienced in this town on account of insufficient water supply have now been overcome—on the whole the provision of W.C. accommodation and the disposal of refuse is satisfactory. I am inclined to attribute to the improvement in this respect, the fact that enteric fever has practically disappeared from the district.

IV. No complaints were received, or representations made in regard to unhealthy areas, under Part I or Part II of the Housing Act, 1890.

V. 1. The Housing Bye-Laws were revised in 1914, and are satisfactory.

2. Bye-Laws relating to Vans and Sheds might, with advantage be adopted.

VI. No action calling for remark, not covered by the above particulars, has been taken during the year in connection with overcrowding, insanitary property and housing.

APPENDICES.

HOUSING CONDITIONS.

STATISTICS.

Year ended 31st December, 1920.

1.—GENERAL.

(1) Estimated population	...	...	...	6058
(2) General death rate	...	...	...	24·2
(3) Death rate from tuberculosis	...	...	...	0·82
(4) Infantile mortality	...	...	...	40·8
(5) Number of dwelling houses of all classes	...	...	...	1528
(6) Number of working class dwelling houses	about	...	...	1470
(7) Number of new working class houses erected	...	...	...	Nil.

2.—UNFIT DWELLING HOUSES.

I.—Inspection.

(1) Total number of dwelling houses inspected for housing defects (under Public Health or Housing Acts)	...	...	...	344
(2) Number of dwelling houses which were inspected and recorded under the Housing (Inspection of District) Regulations, 1910	...	...	...	20

(3) Number of dwelling houses found to be in a state so dangerous or injurious to health as to be unfit for human habitation	5
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(4) Number of dwelling houses (exclusive of those referred to under the preceding sub-heading) found not to be in all respects reasonably fit for human habitation	11
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II.—Remedy of Defects without Service of formal Notices.

Number of defective dwelling-houses rendered fit in consequence of informal action by the Local Authority or their officers	Nil.
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III.—Action under Statutory Powers.

A. *Proceedings under section 28 of the Housing, Town Planning Act, 1919, and section 15 of the H. and T.P. Act, 1909.*

(1) Number of dwelling-houses in respect of which notices were served requiring repairs	11
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(2) Number of dwelling-houses which were rendered fit—				
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(a) by owners	11
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(b) by Local Authority in default of owners	Nil.
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(3) Number of dwelling-houses in respect of which Closing Orders became operative in pursuance of declarations by owners of intention to close	Nil.
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B. *Proceedings under Public Health Acts.*

(1) Number of dwelling-houses in respect of which notices were served requiring defects to be remedied	20
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(2) Number of dwelling-houses in which defects were remedied—

(a) by owners	16
(b) by Local Authority in default of owners	4

C. Proceedings under Section 17 and 18 of the Housing, Town Planning, &c., Act, 1909.

(1) Number of representations made with a view to the making of Closing Orders	5
(2) Number of dwelling-houses in respect of which Closing Orders were made	5
(3) Number of dwelling-houses in respect of which Closing Orders were determined, the dwelling-houses having been rendered fit	2
(4) Number of dwelling-houses in respect of which Demolition Orders were made	2
(5) Number of dwelling-houses demolished in pursuance of Demolition Orders	Nil.

3.—UNHEALTHY AREAS.

Areas represented to the Local Authority with a view to Improvement Schemes under (a) Part I., or (b) Part II., of the Act of 1890 :—

(1) Name of area	...	...	...	Nil.
(2) Acreage	...	...	...	Nil.
(3) Number of working-class houses in area	..			Nil.
(4) Number of working-class persons to be displaced				Nil.

4.—Number of houses not complying with the building bye-laws erected with consent of Local Authority under section 25 of the Housing, Town Planning, &c., Act, 1919 ... Nil.

5. Staff engaged on housing work with, briefly, the duties of each officer :—

The Borough Surveyor and his assistant act as Architect and Clerk of Works.

An Accountant has been specially appointed.

